

Oral Herpes (aka, Cold Sores)

Oral herpes - which is also referred to as cold sores - is caused by a virus called *herpes simplex type 1*. This infection is commonly acquired for the first time in early childhood and may reappear throughout a person's lifetime.

Who gets this disease?

Anyone can get oral herpes.

How is it Spread?

Oral herpes is spread through close person-to-person contact such as direct contact with saliva or the sores (e.g., kissing).

What are the symptoms?

There are initial infections and in some people recurrent sores (fluid-like blisters). In young children the initial infections may not cause any symptoms or can involve many sores within the mouth, on the cheeks, lips and/or gums. The sores will crust and heal within a few days. If the sores within the mouth are extensive, children can run a fever and refuse to drink or eat.

How soon do symptoms appear?

In initial infections, it takes from 2 to 12 days from the time a person is exposed until the sores become apparent. Recurrent sores occur in individuals when the virus becomes active after being dormant.

What is the treatment?

Most cold sores heal in a few days without treatment. There are ointments available that may shorten the healing time but there is no cure for oral herpes. It is best to check with your physician to see if treatment is indicated.

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

1. Frequent hand washing.
2. Caregivers should wear gloves when contact with sores is necessary (e.g., when applying medication).
3. Clean and disinfect mouthed toys daily or when soiled.
4. Do not kiss an infected person when lesions are present.

Who should be excluded?

No exclusion is necessary for mild oral herpes in children who are in control of their mouth secretions. Exclude children who do not have control of oral secretions when active sores are present inside the mouth.

Reportable?

No. Oral herpes is not reportable by New Hampshire law. However the Bureau public health nurses are available for consultation.